Question 4. From the series of IMAGINED WORLDS research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designers that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500-word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

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STAR WARS: A Three Eyed, Tusked, Insect-like Alien, Wielding a Scimitar.

By Harry Wilson.

"The Star Wars saga leaves plenty of room for diverse interpretations."
(Sunstein, 2016, p4.)

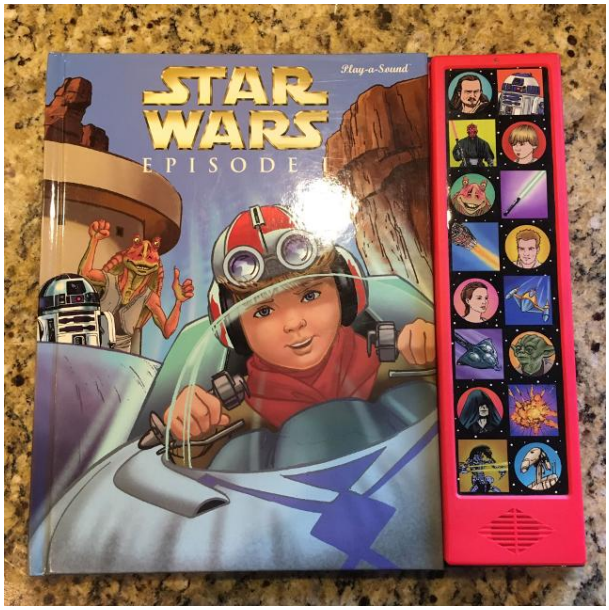
For this essay, I have chosen question four. Under the rule of the Soviet Union, Hungary produced an iconic set of Star Wars posters. Star Wars is about interpretation. With the use of semiotics from the strand lectures, I will look at the interpretation that was hindered by politics and sociology during the life of the Hungarian graphic designer. I will reflect my own interpretation and explore the background of both myself, and that of a graphic designer from Hungary, during the 1970's.

During the conception of Star Wars, George Lucas drew this thought process directly from the book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). Which focus' directly on the role of the hero and how he appears within an array of dissimilar myths. "The Heroes Journey has deep psychological resonance. It taps directly into the recesses of the human psyche. Whoever you are, its your tale as well." (Sunstein, 2016, p5). An observation that resonates with me on a psychological, physical and spiritual level. Not once do I question the legitimacy of the story that is just, dare I say it, not real. A story that is merely from someone's imagination. The lessons that the narrative provides, is to me, forever more than just story telling. I look to stand by them every day. In the words of Yoda, "Do, or do not. There is no try." *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (1980).

My youngest memories of Star Wars are sporadic and definitely not as obsessive as they are today. When I was three, I had an interactive Star Wars story book (Fig. 1). I had no idea how to read, but the sound effects would be the element that stood the test of time and I still

have that book today. *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones* (2002) was the first of the saga I ever watched. I was over my friend's house where he had it on VHS, we had it on in the background whilst playing with our Pokémon cards. It's safe to say he didn't take the same from that experience as I did. 2005 was the height of my Star Wars craze which would shape my future and the reminiscence of the childhood I had. The most important aspect to Star Wars for me is my childhood experience. Everything that wasn't Star Wars canon, the playing in the playground with lightsabers from Kellogg's boxes (Fig. 2), the times playing Star Wars video games with your best friend, even the time when you trade your favourite lightsaber for a Gameboy Advance without telling your parents. The crazes as a child that will live through you for the rest of your life.

Star Wars is about friendship, I don't think I sat down with one of my friends growing up and watch one film. We didn't need to. We had lightsabers, we had the force, we wrote our own narrative, which to me was one of the purest experiences of Star Wars I've ever had. There is not a day that goes by where I don't reminisce. In an interesting article by Emily Bazelon, she talks about why Star Wars still takes over the minds of small boys. After analysing her sons own obsession with Star Wars, she comes to the conclusion that it stems from "overwhelming length and co-branding" Bazelon (2009). Highlighting not only the enduring length of the films but the "relentless marketing: birthday party plates, cups, candles, Lego ships, a recent cartoon series." Bazelon (2009). As I stated before, one of my fondest memories was subject to this marketing. Growing up we would run around the playground of my junior school, wielding 3.5-inch lightsabers from a cereal carton (Fig. 2). As a class we had the entire collection. True, they had to be banned as they turned out to be more like blunt shivs in a prison setting in the eyes of the teachers. All of this echoes exactly what was stated in the article, "kids covet the paraphernalia partly because their friends are flaunting it." Bazelon (2009). I am blessed to have had some great friends with the same interests and excitable tendencies as I did and still do. There is not a doubt, given a lightsaber now I would wield it with the passion of my 9-year-old self.



(Fig. 1)



(Fig. 2)

(Fig. 3)



"Impossible to see, the future is."
Yoda. *Star Wars: Episode III - The Revenge Of The Sith* (2005).

Who would have thought Disney would have bought Star Wars? Who would have thought I'd be writing an essay in University about Star Wars (don't answer that). In later years Star Wars has been about the build-up. Star Wars was reintroduced into people's lives with the release of *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* (2015). From the first ever trailer released in November 2014, to watching a four-day live stream of Star Wars Celebration every year, which I would book annual leave for. In 2015, I was able to attend the midnight showing of the film with my best friend. Naturally, I had bought an Obi-Wan Kenobi costume and attended with my highly collectable Obi-Wan lightsaber. My best friend in a more cost-effective Darth Vader onesie (Fig. 3). From this moment on we had created a tradition to attend every midnight showing of the upcoming films. This would in fact be the time of year we would actually spend time with each other.

Over the years I have found peoples interpretation of Star Wars really interesting. Whether it's something they love to hate, use words like space people and laser swords or even expect a reaction when they say they haven't seen Star Wars.

I've never seen any Star Wars. And I kind of don't watch it now just because it infuriates people so much like, "How? How have you never watched any Star Wars?" And I just kinda wanna see how long I can make it now. Margot Robbie, (2019).

The franchise has impacted on people that haven't even watched it. I want to take this feeling of interpretation and look into the first ever Star Wars posters, under the eye of the Soviet Union.

From 1949 to 1989, Hungary was under the control of the Soviet Union. During this time Star Wars was released, there was a Hungarian artist that would be commissioned to design the posters for the upcoming original Star Wars trilogy, his name was Tibor Helényi (Fig. 9). Helényi was a graphic designer who loved to paint, he made covers for many well-known books published in Hungary and of course a designer of movie posters. Star Wars was

released in Hungary for the first time on 16 August 1979, two years after the US opening.

As you can see Helényi brought his own interpretation to his depiction of Star Wars. The standout feature of Fig.4 is definitely the helmet of Darth Vader. My eyes see a plump child's face looking down with disdain while the grill of the helmet covers up an abnormally long neck. All the while this gigantic longneck baby has the hands of a much older evil entity with piercing nails. There is a visible blue hue within this piece, especially within the main focus point, Vader. It's thought that in many Middle Eastern countries, blue is symbolic for safety, protection and more prominently, immortality. Suggesting the blue shadow of the empire is immortal. R2D2 is obviously represented as part of Vader's armour, actually suggesting that R2D2 is actually a chink in Vader's armour. As within the narrative, R2D2 transports the Death Star plans which ultimately causes the destruction of the empire's biggest asset, the Death Star. Leading to the scene below, Luke's final shot at the main reactor of the Death Star. A spoiler illustrated perfectly at the top of the piece.

Surely you would think it would stop there, but this extends to the background where a three eyed, tusked, insect-like alien, wielding a scimitar stands. The dagger can represent "cutting something bad out, though, you are simultaneously liberating yourself.." BS Srinivasan (2020). This might be received as a spark to the flame of the rebellion within Hungary, conveying hidden meaning. This is a creature of which has never appeared in Star Wars. Helényi is suggesting that it is entirely possible for a creature like this to be in Star Wars. Which imitates the childhood experiences I had with Star Wars, writing a narrative that could exist, with enough imagination and desire. This is reflected within the texts from Sunstein, "True, any interpretation has to fit the material." "But interpreters have a lot of room to understand it in a way that fits their own deepest concerns." (Sunstein, 2016, p66). Every time I re-watch Star Wars, I am watching it with a set of eyes that has had new experiences, which ultimately shapes the way I interpret what I hear and see. Suggesting that however minimal, each viewing is a different interpretation from the last.

(Fig. 4.) Helényi, T. (1979)



The 2nd instalment (Fig. 5) presents itself as the less extraneous of the three. A rendition of *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). The poster features an immense sense of perspective, the colossal size of the AT-AT towering above an already terrifying evil empire. The immaculate detail of the Star Destroyer gives this poster the compositional seasoning it deserves. The yellow/blue gradient might suggest a new day, a new day that is ruled by the empire like a day is ruled by sunlight. Contrasting against the more sunset hue of the first poster. The sun is the most apparent figure in the poster. Its known that our ancestors used to "navigate the sun, moon and stars for finding directions and creating maps. The earliest clock was actually a sundial and became the basis of modern day clocks." La Fuente (2019). Does this suggest the empire is as eternal as the sun is to each day? A sense of a single direction that is above all others.

On the contrary, a clear third of the poster's contents is pure interpretation (Fig. 5). We are presented with roughly seven unrecognisable figures wielding several weapons, at the forefront, an unkind looking gentleman wielding a laser sword similar to that of Darth Vader. Again, sporting a helmet, like Vader, but another variant to what we witnessed in the first poster. This wardrobe choice is apparent throughout all figures featured in this piece, creating this ambiguous continuity that somewhat resembles an evil empire. However, do the seven figures represent the true meaning of seven? Seven is the number of completeness and perfection. In more recent years, we have been greeted by a similar set of seven figures, ruled by one with a red sabre which is actually canonised as The Knights of Ren (Fig. 6) in *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* (2015). No findings suggest a true link to the original Hungarian poster, although the resemblance is uncanny.

(Fig. 5) Helényi, T. (1982)



(Fig. 6) Sliney W. (2019)



Finally, a rendition of *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* (1983) or return of the 'three eyed, tusked, insect-like alien', (Fig. 7). The Green Alien. The epitome of creative freedom. How was Helényi allowed to include this? He didn't want to ever produce pieces of propaganda for the Soviet Union. However, with Star Wars being a western film, the Soviet Union would love nothing more than to approve something that undermined the franchise, misrepresented something from America. Perhaps this explains the approval of these enigmatic pieces as a whole. Their slack resemblance of a franchise, where a mere bystander might deem ill fitted for their taste. A taste that turned out to be beloved across the entire planet. In the final poster we see a 'return of the' yellow. A colour situated throughout the collection. The yellow now meets with a purple haze, perhaps a purple haze that suggests the confusion within the galaxy to the authority of the empire, as the rebellion threatens to overthrow their power. Not to mention the evident blue hue that still shrouds the empire. The second Death Star is situated in Vader's right eye, it appears that his helmet is dissipating in conjunction to the Death Star, highlighting vulnerability throughout all the empires assets. These posters suggest the idea that the Empire in Star Wars could be seen as the Soviet Empire and that the extravagance of these posters would represent the resistance in the country, where through the role of graphic design, nonconformity could be seen. Which strips these posters from a cinematic visual to a real-life interpretation.

(Fig. 7) Helényi, T. (1984)



(Fig. 8.) Árpád Darvas (photo: Zoltán Tuba, Origo)



(Fig. 9.) Tibor Helényi (photo: Zoltán Tuba, Origo)



(Fig. 10) Darvas, A. (1968)



After extensive research, I came across two separate Hungarian interviews, one with the previously stated, Tibor Helényi and the other with the older Árpád Darvas. Both graphic designers from Hungary, that worked through different eras. The following interviews will provide the previous posters with the discernment they deserve. I have translated them to the best of my ability via google translate.

In order to culminate this essay, I must look at what it was like to live in Hungary under the reign of the Soviet Union as a graphic designer. First, we must go back in time and look at the life of Árpád Darvas (Fig. 8), a graphic designer who was in the industry about thirty years before Helényi. Darvas was a pioneer that brought to Hungary new techniques and styles, one of these including pop art (Fig. 10). In the latter half of the sixties, Darvas applied this 'American pop art' to his posters. A style that in Hungary, symbolised the desired "Western" world. Pop art bared the weight of consumerism, which would be an immense aspect of the "Western" Star Wars franchise. It's clear to see as early as the sixties the way was paved by Darvas for Helényi to create his vision of a western creation. Through the seeds of pop art, Star Wars could grow.

"Politics didn't really care what we did." Darvas (2012). A statement not usually heard from a country under the rule of communism. Perhaps this is the cornerstone that explains Helényi's extravagant posters. When the role of the graphic designer wasn't questioned, that was the time to exploit it. "The films were taken from the West and the East without their propaganda. It was invented here next to it, in many cases its address was also changed." Darvas (2012). Never has a quotation expressed such clarity on an inquisition. There is evidence why Helényi's posters where so extraneous. The powers that be obstructed Helényi to see any Star Wars propaganda to base his visuals from, only scenic photo's. An obstruction that only led to self-expression, ultimately a positive for his career.

Now, this very figure, not in the film, was painted when Star Wars was shown. Everyone thought he would see it in the movie. I had a lot of fun with this. Helényi (2013).

Highlighting that the address had been changed to a certain extent, reinforcing Darvas' statement. That change of address encapsulating the creative freedom that graphic designers had in Hungary. When both asked if they admired any current posters on the streets, they stated "Not much, nothing to watch." Helényi (2013) "No. I don't like these. Today, everyone

is told what to do." Darvas (2012) showing as we've 'progressed' as a society, individuality is failing.

During the height of Darvas' career, the role of the graphic designer was the "second best job in the country" Darvas (2012). Behind a doctor, this was also the case for Helényi. He stated that "no one was asking what he was doing, how he was doing, the point was to have the poster" this was during a time of excess demand for labour. Darvas stated, "my parents came from a deep proletarian line" Darvas (2012). A background that prides their capacity to work above all else. But Darvas was an artist, not a labourer. Fortunately, Darvas dug in and his parents let him be. "I said this for a while, then we stayed in this." Darvas (2012). This situation resonates with me tremendously. All the males in my family are labourers. All the females in my family work in healthcare. Then I come along, an artist/graphic designer that's the first to even suggest University, let alone attend. True, my family were never so reluctant for me to pursue my career, however there is a clear sense of security and safety within the expected roles of the family. The only comparable member of my family is my mother. A single mother that wasn't an artist, however her path in life was affected by the lack of opportunities for education. She is sixty-five and when she was just fourteen, she was expected to go out and find a job, half of the income which would go directly to her mother. Due to her background, she was unable the luxury of education, something she was determined wouldn't happen to her children. I was the last out of three to utilise the pathway of further education. My mother's experience reverberates with that of Darvas' obverse fate, whereas mine resonates with Darvas' experience that his job role as a graphic designer would provide liberation in the disparity of his fellow community. I am solely where I am today because of the foundations laid out for me by my mother.

Throughout this essay I have explored the interpretation of the beloved franchise, Star Wars. I have looked into my own personal comprehension and concluded contributing factors to my obsession through the works of Cass R. Sunstein and Emily Bazelon. Through the eyes of my own exposition, I have put it up against the extraneous works of Tibor Helényi. Understanding the motives and the creative choices made that were subject to a regime under the Soviet Union and contrasting Helényi's circumstances with Árpád Darvas', finding the light within the shadow of communism. Analysing and contrasting a dissimilar background and finding common ground between my own experience of the world and that of a Hungarian graphic designer from the 1970's. Whether you love, hate or don't mind Star

Wars. It's about how it makes you feel, not how you make it feel. Your version of Star Wars is as real as the canonised narrative. All of our interpretations are different as it stems all the way back to "The Heroes Journey" (Sunstein, 2016, p5). We interpret Star Wars in the eyes of our own experience. Subconsciously linking events within a made-up narrative to our own real-life stories, meaning there is no right or wrong. I have come to the conclusion that the "Three Eyed, Tusked, Insect-like Alien, Wielding a Scimitar." Is the metaphor to the answer of the question of interpretation.

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